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Uncommon Knowledge

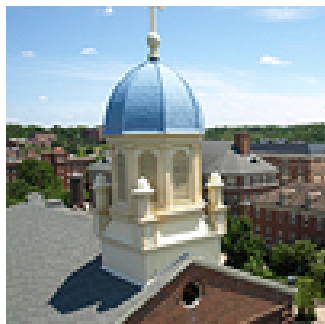
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Uncommon Knowledge

07.03.2013 | Catholic, Students, Campus and Community

In August, the University of Dayton will debut the first major revision in more than 20 years to what is essentially the heart and soul of any university — the undergraduate curriculum.

"We did not merely tinker with or tweak what we already have," said Provost Joseph Saliba. "We are building a new educational structure that will be a major feature of our identity as a university for years to come. If one of the purposes of a major is to prepare students for a career, the central purpose of the Common Academic Program is to prepare them for life."

Catholic, Marianist educational outcomes and core values distinctive to the University of Dayton are the foundation of the new curriculum, which integrates the human aspect into every discipline and major, according to Paul Benson, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

For example a sophomore engineering course, "Engineering Innovation and the Human Condition," brings together engineering, sociology and philosophy to explore the effects and the ethical dimensions of inventions such as the automobile on society.

Michael Beaty, a board member for the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts and chair of the philosophy department at Baylor University, called the effort "bold and noteworthy."

"By putting the humanities at the center of the curriculum and placing the natural and social sciences and professional education in relation to the humanities, the Common Academic Program exhibits real unity, integration and interdisciplinary focus," he said. "The educational experience generated by such a well-ordered and imaginative program is potentially quite transformative for students. And that is really significant; a lot of colleges pay lip service to creating a transformative education, but actually do very little to bring it about," Beaty said.

"Even more remarkable is the deep consensus that emerged, resulting in a program that is unified in terms of its purpose, comprehensive in its breadth, and unapologetically Catholic and Marianist."

As approved by the Academic Senate, CAP calls for all students to excel not just in their majors but to graduate with:

- experience producing a body of artistic, scholarly or community-based work for public presentation
- skills in interfaith dialogue for major faith traditions, including familiarity with Catholic theology and practice
- skills in community building and collaborative leadership in workplaces, homes and neighborhoods
- practical wisdom for addressing deep human problems and needs
- an ability to evaluate critically and imaginatively the challenges of the times
- an appreciation for diversity through an understanding of the cultures, histories, times and places of others around the world
- an ability to see their lives as a vocation or calling

With a growing number of international students and the need for U.S. students to think globally, the curriculum also emphasizes intercultural knowledge and competence and promotes expanded education-abroad experiences, such as with the University of Dayton China Institute.

Benson said the new curriculum was developed over six years; 45 new full-time faculty were hired to help launch it. More than 179 professors have developed more than 54 pilot "crossing boundaries" courses, each integrating at least three disciplines and creating learning experiences that prepare students to respond creatively and ethically to rapid changes in the world and society as well as contribute as leaders in building societies fostering human well-being and social justice.

A new oral communication class banishes the days of standing up in front of the class, sweating and delivering a speech. Instead, students will be graded on their abilities to put communication skills to work to engage in civil discussion.

Joseph Valenzano, assistant professor of communication, said the course helps build essential skills such explaining information to people who aren't experts and engaging on controversial topics with other people civilly in ways that lead to understanding, if not agreement. And he said it's unlike any other communication course in the country.

"We want to help students deliver the skills necessary to dial down the vitriol and volume in our public discourse so as a society we can better identify ways to move forward," Valenzano said.